Chesapeake Beach Railroad Engine House
21 Yost Place
Seat Pleasant
Prince George's County
Maryland

HAER No. MD-49

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
MID-ATLANTIC REGION NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD HAER No. MD-49

CHESAPEAKE BEACH RAILROAD ENGINE HOUSE

SEAT PLEASANT, PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, MARYLAND

HAER MD, 17-SEPL, 2-

Location: Located three-quarters of a mile from the DC - MD line, east of Yost Place, approximately 100 yards northeast of the intersection of Central Avenue (MD Route 214) end East Capital Street; bounded by Yost Place, the Charles County Concrete Works, and vacant land once associated with the Chesapeake Beach Railway, shops and yard.

U.S.G.S. Washington East, DC - MD Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 18. 4305770. 335125.

Present Owner: The City of Seat Pleasant
6301 Addison Road
Seat Pleasant, MD 20743

Present Use: Vacant and deteriorated; subject to probable UDAG grant for commercial development; projected date of demolition, 1985.

Significance: Built as the major service structure in the only yard and shop complex owned by the Chesapeake Beach Railway (in business 1897-1935), the engine house is a rare survivor of a once common service-building type long associated with steam-powered railroading. The engine house is also significant for its past association with a twenty-eight mile standard gauge railroad which was the first direct rail link between the nation's capital and the Chesapeake Bay. (Williams, 1975, p.2) Coincidentally, the property's association with an ill-fated resort development scheme promoted by Otto Mears (developer of Colorado's Rio Grande Southern Railroad, among others) and financed largely by David Moffat (President, Denver and Rio Grande Railroad and president, Denver National Bank) also lends to significance. With the recent demolition of the 1880's Wilmington and Northern roundhouse in Wilmington, Delaware, the five-bay, brick engine house at Seat Pleasant (the most modest of the six "roundhouses" which are known to survive in the Northeast), is a unique example of the type facility once constructed by short line railroads to service their own locomotives.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Dates of Construction: Begun October 10, 1901; completed February 14, 1902 (Edwards and Lange, 1978, Item 8, p. 3, n. 8, citing interview with Ames Williams). Construction was preceded by at

least five preliminary measures: 1) electric trolley service connected with the Chesapeake Beach Railway at the District line; 2) tracks and spurs were installed in the yard; 3) electric traction, preferred by Mears, was rejected in favor of steam locomotion; 4) a sixty foot turntable was installed in 1898 (Williams, 1975, p.48); and 5) a cypress water tank was installed north of the turntable in 1900 (Williams, 1975, p. 65, Plate 1). Notably, company title to the land was not recorded until 1903 (see below).

2. Architect: Not known. May have been William Beerbower. A civil engineer, Beerbower had worked on Otto Mears' Rio Grande Southern Railroad; he was employed by the Chesapeake Beach Railway in 1898 particularly to work at the Chesapeake Beach resort, built at the railway's eastern terminus (Williams, 1975, pp. 33, 63). Architect may also inadvertently have been Otto Mears who, as General Manager of the railway between 1897 and 1902, "frequently overruled decisions of his engineering staff in the interests of speed and economy" (Williams, 1975, p. 28). Plans may have been based on Colorado precedent.

3. Original and subsequent owners: Reference to the chain of title to the land upon which the subject structure stands are in the office of the Recorder of Deeds, Prince George's County, Upper Marlboro, Maryland.

   1898 Deed, March 28, 1898, recorded in Volume JB1, folio 515. William Lacy and Bettie M. Lacy to Charles Popper.

   1903 Deed, March 23, 1903, recorded in Volume 15, folio 278. Charles Popper and Lottie Popper to Chesapeake Beach Railway Co.

   1936 Deed, April 30, 1936, recorded in Volume 470, folio 388. Charles R. Webber [assignee] to East Washington Railroad Company.

   1981 Deed, January 19, 1981, recorded in Volume 5420, folio 47. East Washington Railroad Company to City of Seat Pleasant.

4. Builder, Contractor: Not known. All work is thought to have been let out by Chesapeake Bay Construction Company, a Colorado corporation with offices in Denver, New York, Washington, DC, and Baltimore. Only contractor known to date is Ferguson Contracting Company, New York City, the firm recorded as having excavated, cut timber, and laid track for the Chesapeake Beach Railway (Williams, 1975, p.25).

5. Original Plans and Construction: The engine house was built in the configuration of a segmented fifth portion of a circle. Constructed of brick with walls 14-1/2" thick, it was a one-story structure which featured four repair bays, and presumably an end-bay machine shop, all accessible from a sixty foot turntable (Plates 1 and 2).

B. Historical Context:

Otto Mears, the Russian-born, Colorado-based entrepreneur known as the "pathfinder of the San Juan" (Schneider, 1975, p. 1), was the principal promoter of the Chesapeake Beach Railway. Mears had planned that his direct link to Chesapeake Bay would be a high speed line run by electric power from a third rail system (Williams, 1975, p.27). Notably, once the engine house was completed and steam locomotives were fully in service, Mears resigned as General Manager of the Chesapeake Beach Railway. David Moffat, the richest man in Colorado by 1900, was the major sponsor before 1902, when the engine house was completed. The work accomplished during the tenure of these men essentially remained intact for the whole course of the history of the railroad. Beginning when Washington had developed into an urban area, and government employees were an identifiable holiday market for the railroad, the Chesapeake Beach Railway was planned as a passenger rail line to the Bay resort which Mears hoped would rival the renowned New England casino resorts. While occasional freight to and from the local agricultural area was carried at night, the passenger business to and from Chesapeake Beach was the focus of the railroad. The company ceased operation in 1935, the victim of a major economic depression.

1. Development of the railroad yards

By 1903, the yard located in rural Maryland near the District limits, in an area called Seat Pleasant after 1906, was occupied by the engine house, a turntable, sidings and storage tracks, a paint shop (Plate 3) and a water tank, (Plate 4) (Williams, 1975, p.86; Figure 1). Other secondary structures were added between 1903 and in 1936.

In 1936, after the property had passed into receivership, the Seat Pleasant Yard included the trackage, the turntable, the paint shop, the water tank, and the engine house, then listed as a round house. Also extant was a coal bin, a car shed, a sand house, an oil house, a motor car house, a storehouse, and an engine house (Prince George's County Land Records, volume 470, folio 388). Presumably, the engine house related to a stationary steam engine which related either to a machine shop or to the pump which fed creek water to the watering standard.

The East Washington Railway Company, another Denver-based operation, purchased the yards in 1936 in order to set up a short line to transport materials to a local lumber company and coal to the Potomac Electric's Benning Power Station. Changes in function of both the engine (round) house and the ancillary buildings occurred soon after the transfer. Comparatively obsolete once the East Washington opted for diesel traction, the water tank was demolished sometime after 1966 and before 1968 (Plates 2 and 3); the turntable was sold for scrap in 1971 (Williams, 1975, p. 48). Three interior tracks remained until after 1978 (Edwards and Lange, 1978, Item 7, p.1). Today no tracks and no outbuildings survive.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Description:

1. A segmental "C" in plan, the engine house is a one story brick building built for the repair and maintenance of steam locomotives and later adapted for the maintenance of diesel engines. The property is oriented in a north/south axis; the front access bays relate to the north wall.

The central bay of the north face is now infilled (Plate 5). the corners of the north elevations are finished by a pier detail which related to a wood post from which the doors once hung (Plate 6). The outside face of this post detail is a beaded board panel, while the pier itself, an element which is two brick courses thick, rises to the eaves line. The west elevation (Plates 6 and 7) is characterized by three pier-flanked window bays. Segmentally headed openings are common to all extant window features (Plate 8). Construction of the intersticial piers relates to that of the corner piers with the exception that the wall piers, conforming to the roof slope, step back to relate in height to the south corner elements (Plates 9, 10).

The wide south elevation has been substantially infilled, with only two original window bays and one doorway comparatively intact (Plates 11, 12). One door leaf, with screen frame intact, exhibits single pin hinges (Plate 12). The east elevation now infilled, except for one window, relates to a frame lean-to shed near the northeast corner (Plates 13, 14, 15).

B. Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: east and west elevations, 76' 4"; north elevation 66' 1-1/2"; south elevation, 135' 0-1/2".

2. Foundations: unexcavated.

3. Walls: Brick, 14 inches thick, set in common bond usually with six or seven courses of stringers to one course of headers. Occasional running bond veneer infill over concrete block.

4. Condition of Fabric: Good to poor; walls comparatively stable.

5. Openings:

   a. Doors: Oversized, double-swing doors set in wood frames once related to four of the five original bays (Plates 1 and 2). Doorheads typically feature diagonal bracing common to screened spaces.

   b. Windows: Set in segmentally-headed openings, the windows featured double-hung, 12/12 sash (Plate 8), no longer intact. Arches refer to three courses of header bricks; concrete sills.

6. Hardware: Only a few pins and hinges survive.

7. Roof: Single pitch, with a slope between 11% and 12%, covered with asphalt.

C. Interior

1. Floor plan: See enclosed plan, p. 10.

2. Flooring: Largely packed dirt with patches of concrete.

3. Structural System: Timber-framed, post-and-beam system with braced posts. Eight posts set up equidistant front-to-back and side-to-side, identify five work bays.

4. Condition of Fabric: Good to poor. Few early components survive; posts are imbedded in concrete, (Plates 16, 17).

5. Openings:

   a. Doors: A former window opening provides access to a twenty-two foot shed addition, attached to the east wall. Surviving portions of double-swing doors open out.

   b. Windows: Relating to the second course of brick in the wall construction, window heads are flat.

6. Decorative features and trim: Nonexistent.

7. Hardware: Extant only occasionally, hinges and pins are cast metal.

8. Equipment:

a. Ventilation: Smokestack vents survive in Bays 2, 3; 3, 4. (Plate 17; see also plan, p. 10).

b. Lighting: None survives

c. Plumbing: None survives, although a bathroom existed in the northwest corner as recently as 1978 (Edwards and Lange, 1978, Item 7, p. 1).

d. Trackage: Only portions of ties survive in Bay 5,6 (see plan, p.11), although three track beds set in concrete flooring existed as recently as 1978 (Edwards and Lange, 1978, Item 7, p. 1)

e. Shafting: Hangers for belt shafting are visible in Bay 1,2 (Plate 18, see also plan, p.10).

f. Pits: A work pit, probably reconstructed, exists in Bay 2,3 (see plan, p.10).

D. Site:

1. General setting: Little of the visual record of the yard has survived, most of the area having been obliterated by demolition and by the work of the Charles County Concrete Company. South of the engine house, the land slopes to Central Avenue, where it merges with Capital Street, (MD Route 214) a six-lane traffic artery leading from the District of Columbia to Interstate 95.

PART III SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Photographic Views:

Collection of Chesapeake Beach Railroad Museum
Chesapeake Beach, Maryland

Collection of Mr. Bernard Loveless
Chesapeake Beach, Maryland

B. Interviews:

Gibb, Hugh. Historian, National Railway Historical Society, Newark, Delaware.

Keefer, Walter. Railroad Historian; former engineer, Denver and Rio Grande. Grand Junction, Colorado.

Loveless, Bernard. Director, Chesapeake Beach Railroad Museum. Chesapeake Beach, Maryland.

Williams, Ames. Railroad historian. Alexandria, Virginia.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and Unpublished Sources:

Prince George's County Courthouse, Land Records:

Book JB1, Folio 515, March 28, 1898.

Book 15, Folio 278, March 23, 1903.

Book 470, Folio 388, April 30, 1936.

Book 5420, Folio 47, January 19, 1981.

2. Secondary and Published Sources:

Frame, Robert M. III. "Railroad Shop Projects Steam Up for Rehab," Society for Industrial Archeology Newsletter, 12:2.3 (Spring and Summer 1983), pp. 10, 11.

Jones, Dwayne. "Chesapeake Beach Railway Company Engine House: A Report on Its Potential Reuse," paper for course in Economics of Preservation, George Washington University, DC, Spring 1984.

Kennedy, George. "Many from District Enjoy '4th' at Old Time Bay Resort," Washington Star, July 6, 1953.

Edwards, Mark, and Ralph Lange. "Chesapeake Beach Railroad Engine House," National Register of Historic Places Inventory - Nomination Form, August, 1978.

Schneider, James G., "Otto Mears, Pathfinder of the San Juan," The Westerner's Board Book, XXXI:11, 12, (Jan., Feb., 1975), p. 1.

Vesey, Tom. "End of the Line for a Roundhouse?," Washington Post, May 25, 1983.

Wilkins, Tivis E., comp. Colorado Railroads. Boulder, Colorado: Pruitt Publishing Company, 1974, pp. 24, 95.

Williams, Ames W. Otto Mears Goes East: The Chesapeake Beach Railway. Alexandria, Virginia: Meridian Sun Press, 1975.

D. Suggestions for Further Study or Inquiry:

Chesapeake Beach Railroad Museum. Uncatalogued collection of Company records dating after 1924, now stored at U.S. Naval, Research Laboratory, Randall Cliff, Maryland, and currently unavailable.

Virta, Alan. Director, Prince George's County Planning Comission, has been unavailable but may have photographs and/or recollections of interior as furnished by East Washington Railway. Address: 8244 Canning Terrace, Greenbelt, Maryland. Telephone: (301) 474-7524.

Young, Norris R. Engineer for the East Washington Railway, has been unavailable. Address: P. O. Box 842, York, Pennsylvania, 17405. Telephone: (717) 854-7024.

PROJECT INFORMATION

The Seat Pleasant Engine House was deemed eligible for the National Register in 1982, following which action the City of Seat Pleasant sought appropriate reuse for the property. Despite efforts of the City and the Historic Preservation Commission of Prince George's County, no viable adaptive reuse proposals were forthcoming within the so-called Central Avenue Redevelopment Project. The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation then issued a Memorandum of Agreement, including the stipulation that the engine house be recorded prior to any demolition.

This survey of the Chesapeake Beach Railroad Engine House was undertaken by John Milner Associates, Inc., from December 2 to December 16, 1984, under contract to the City of Seat Pleasant. Demolition of the premises is proposed in order to facilitate site redevelopment under a UDAG grant, to be undertaken by Horning Brothers, 1730 Rhode Island Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20016.

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December 18, 1984

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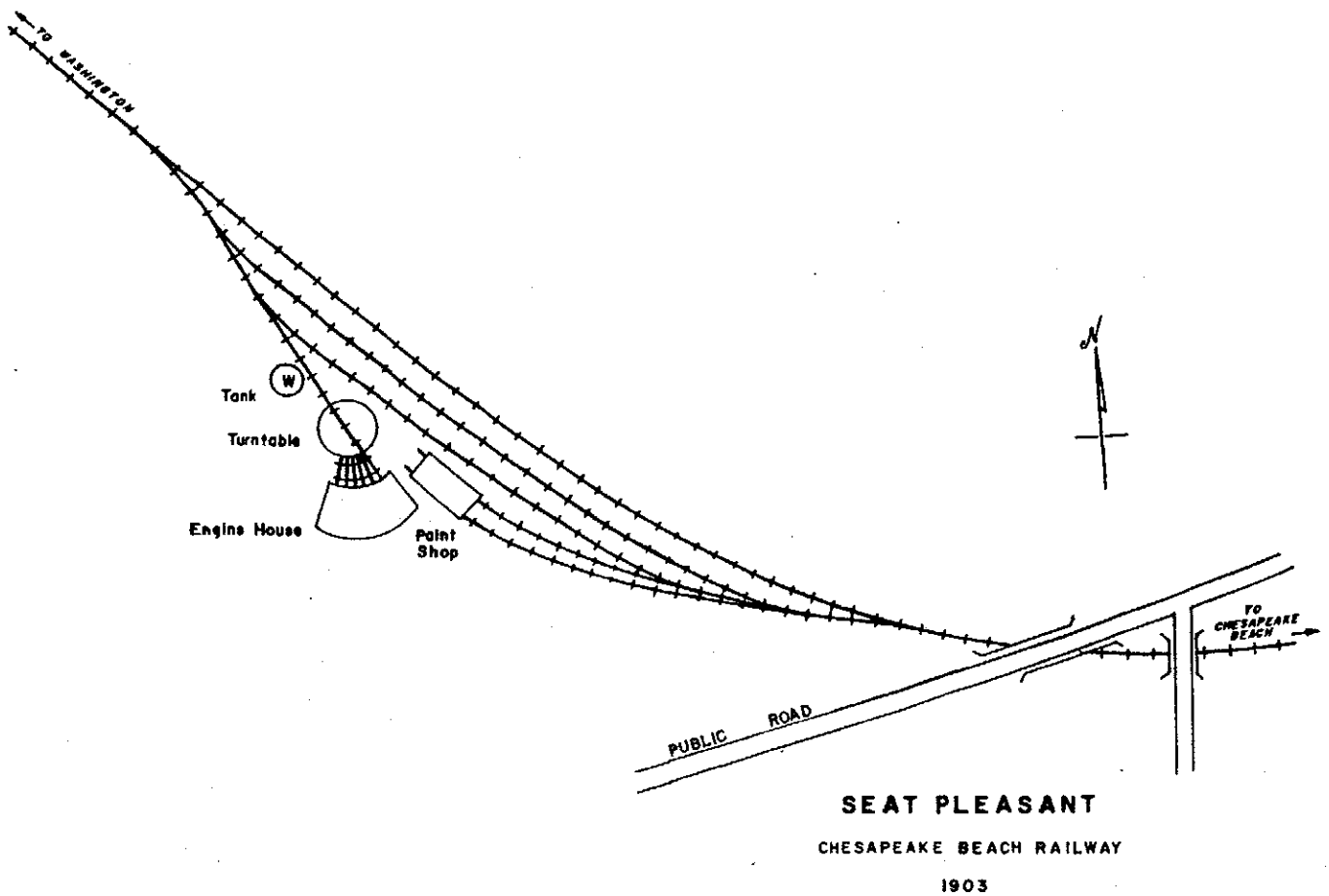
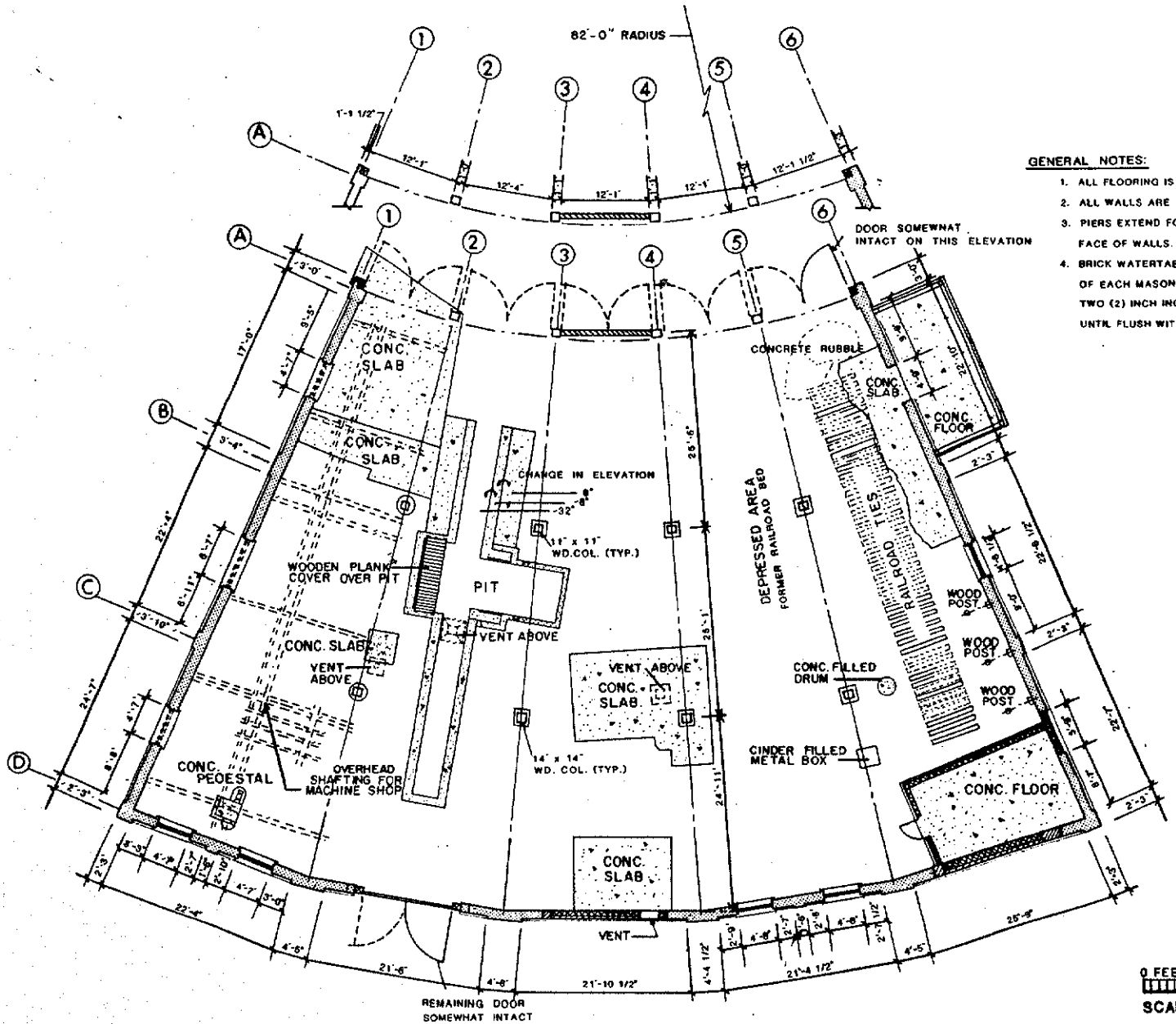


Source: Williams. 1975, p.86

Figure 1



GENERAL NOTES:

1. ALL FLOORING IS DIRT UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED.
2. ALL WALLS ARE 14 INCHES THICK.
3. PIERS EXTEND FOUR (4) INCHES OUT FROM EXTERIOR FACE OF WALLS.
4. BRICK WATERTABLE IS FLUSH WITH THE FACE OF EACH MASONRY PIER AND THEN STEPS BACK IN TWO (2) INCH INCREMENTS OVER SUCCESSIVE COURSES UNTIL FLUSH WITH THE EXTERIOR FACE OF THE WALL.

KEY

- BRICK STRUCTURE
- BRICK VENEER INFILL
- CONCRETE BLOCK INFILL
- CONCRETE

0 FEET 10 15 20
SCALE

NORTH

Chesapeake Beach Railroad Engine House
HAER No. MD-49 (Page 10)

PREPARED BY JOHN BOLINER ASSOCIATES 1984 DELINEATED BY WESLEY L. SMITH

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR	NAME AND LOCATION of STRUCTURE CHESAPEAKE BEACH RAILROAD ENGINE HOUSE SEAT PLEASANT, PRINCE GEORGES COUNTY, MARYLAND	SURVEY NO. HAER MD-49	HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD SHEET 1 OF 1	INDEX NO.